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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PRETORIA 004048

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FOR OES/PCI/LBRUTTEN, DROCHBERG, ESHAW
FOR AF/S/JDIFFILY, AF/EPS
EPA FOR OIA/BAILEY, MERCURIO

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICA COMMEMORATES SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF
JOHANNESBURG SUMMIT WITH NATIONAL CONFERENCE, ROUNDTABLES

Sensitive but unclassified--please handle accordingly.

1. (U) Summary: South Africans and selected foreign guests (from the UN system, Africa, Brazil, and international labor and civil society organizations) participated in a national conference on sustainable development held September 1-3 in Johannesburg, in commemoration of the second anniversary of the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Participants highlighted progress attained by South Africa in meeting sustainable development targets and continued constraints and challenges faced by South Africa and the rest of the developing world. Representatives of local civil society, NGOs, business, academia, provincial and local governments participated in the government-organized conference, but the program's structure did not allow for extensive dialogue. NGO protestors at the event focused on renewable energy and affordable access to energy by the poor. End summary.

//Introduction//

2. (U) On September 1-3, the Sandton Convention Center was busy with discussion and dialogue on sustainable development, two years after World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) meetings at the same site. This time, the discussion, organized by the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) centered on South Africa and its responses to commitments made at the Johannesburg summit in 2002. Many of the planning documents can be found at <http://www.environment.gov.za/jhb2/index.html>, and additional speeches and summaries of sessions will eventually be posted to this website, according to DEAT sources.

//Speakers address progress, resource constraints//

3. (U) Minister for Environmental Affairs and Tourism Marthinus Van Schalkwyk and Foreign Affairs Minister Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma spoke at the opening events on September 1.

4. (U) In his welcoming remarks, Minister van Schalkwyk noted that South Africa's implementation of WSSD goals was largely ahead of schedule in areas such as water, sanitation and housing. He praised positive developments in identifying alternative, renewable energy sources to diversify from coal-based energy dependence, and in "mainstreaming" environmental issues and beefing up enforcement. Minister Van Schalkwyk issued a warning to industries in South Africa, singling out refineries, to "clean up their act" in anticipation of new Air Quality legislation. He also announced the imminent appointments of members to a National Environmental Advisory Forum, to strengthen partnerships between government and civil society. The Minister encouraged establishment of a national framework for sustainable development to address the tensions and numerous "contradictions"--including between industrial development and health and environmental quality; between providing affordable energy and addressing climate change; between the need for investment, jobs and development and the benefits of conserving biodiversity; and between food security, biotechnology and concerns about the impact of Genetically Modified Organisms on the environment.

5. (U) Minister Dlamini Zuma noted that political will exists to address numerous sustainable development challenges, but the "missing element" is resources to implement the Johannesburg Program of Implementation. She noted that resources exist globally, but they "need to be distributed from areas of great abundance to areas of scarcity."

6. (U) International speakers at opening sessions included WSSD Secretary General Nitin Desai, Chair of the 13th Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), John Ashe, and the head of the Labor Foundation for Sustainable Development, Marga Ferre. Desai spoke without prepared remarks and noted that the war on terrorism had diverted attention and resources away from efforts to attain

sustainable development targets. He cited the U.S. invasion of Iraq in contravention of the UN and the breakdown of Cancun World Trade Organization negotiations as contributing to the erosion of the "unity of purpose" generated by WSSD, and of multilateralism. Desai also noted the donor community's failure to meet development assistance target levels, which negatively impacted implementation of projects on sustainable development.

//Sector-specific roundtables engage line departments//

17. (U) Many Ministers, Deputy Ministers and Directors-General of government departments participated in sector-specific roundtables that their departments organized. Roundtables explored developments in important areas such as water, housing, energy, agriculture and science & technology, as well as governance of sustainable development and the role of business. Notably missing was a roundtable on health issues, which figured prominently in WSSD. Health was addressed briefly within the Energy roundtable, with a discussion of the program to remove lead from gasoline and the implementation of low-smoke fuel techniques.

//NGO protestors demand more from SAG on energy//

18. (U) Several NGOs, including Earthlife Africa, the Environmental Justice Networking Forum (EJNF) and the Anti-Privatization Forum, protested outside the venue. Earthlife and EJNF were seeking broader, more affordable access to energy for South African citizens, particularly the poor, as well as stronger government targets for developing and using renewable energy sources. An EJNF representative told ES&T FSN that the NGOs want the government to invest much more in renewables such as wind and solar power, to increase utilization of energy to rates of 20 percent, compared to the current target of 0.5 percent.

19. (SBU) Comment: Although the event did not come together until mid-to-late August, it was well organized, fairly well attended, and focused on the positive developments in South Africa on sustainable development. Representatives from provincial and local governments, civil society and NGOs participated, but most sessions were heavy on presentations and left little if any time for discussion and genuine dialogue with participants.

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